

## At The Serpentarium

The guide

Excusably picturesque in helmeted tropical regalia  
Wreathed indolent black folds of snake about his face,  
Crowning himself in false malevolence.

He called a boy from the crowd to touch the snake,  
A boy who worked there and knew his part of the show,  
Yet casual and without guile.

Then my turn.

“Just the tail for the lady,”  
Half-hoping I would elegantly flinch.  
So I touched it,  
Didn't shake,  
Overcame the in-born, id-born fact of horror.

And saw how secret fears might prove to be  
(If publically avowed)  
Smooth to the touch,  
Ductile.

“What's like?” he said.  
“Buckskin, linen, grandma's hound;”  
The rest just grinned.  
(It wasn't so bad,)

And one regrets  
The lack of some sun-helmeted conspirator  
Who, wreathed in black omnipotence, might allow  
The ambiguous skin of hate and war and such fearsome  
daily reptiles  
Complacently to come  
Under reluctant hands,

There to ground terror  
In touch.

-- Dorothy Nyren